

MEDIA CONCENTRATION FOLLOWING PASSAGE OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, in 1996, the Congress passed the Telecommunications Act. I was involved in the passage of that act. I served on the Commerce Committee, and we wrote the first rewrite of the telecommunications law in some 60 years.

One of the contentious areas in that debate was the ownership limits on television and radio stations. The ownership limits on television and radio stations in this country were established over the years because we wanted to promote localism in radio and television stations, local ownership, local control, so that people living in an area would have some notion that those who were distributing information over their television and radio stations would have some idea of local responsibility.

It is interesting what has happened since 1996. When we had that debate in 1996, the Commerce Committee took all the limits off radio stations. You could own as many as you want. They took the limits that existed on television stations and increased it.

I authored an amendment on the floor of the Senate to change what happened inside the Commerce Committee. I offered an amendment saying I didn't think that was the right way to go. We didn't need bigger ownership groups owning the radio and television stations. The amendment would have restored the ownership limits on television stations in this country.

We had a rollcall vote, and I won with Senator Dole leading the opposition. It was a surprise to everyone, but I won. Then a Senator on the other side asked for permission to change his vote. He changed his vote because he wanted it to be reconsidered at some point. That was at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. And then dinner intervened. About 7 or 8 o'clock that evening, as I recall, they asked for reconsideration of the vote, and four or five Members of the Senate had some sort of epiphany over the dinner hour and discovered their earlier vote was wrong and they really had to change their vote, so I lost.

I understand how things work here. I understand what happened over the dinner hour. People didn't have bandages and visibly broken arms, but clearly pressure was applied because over a period of 3 or 4 hours people changed their votes, and I lost. We have no ownership national limits on radio stations, and the ownership limits on television stations have been dramatically relaxed. The number of television stations you could own has increased.

Let me show a chart on radio stations. In 1996, we had the top 10 companies in this country owning roughly 400 radio stations. Clear Channel had 57

stations. This total was about 400 radio stations for the top 10 companies. Let me show you what this looks like today on this chart. These are the top 10. Between them, they now own well over 2,000 radio stations. Clear Channel owns over a thousand by itself following its merger with AM/FM. I won't go through the rest of them. You can see what is happening—a massive concentration. They are buying up radio stations all over the country.

In 1996, Clear Channel wasn't in North Dakota. Now they own numerous stations in the State. In Minot, ND, a former broadcaster called me and said: Do you know what is happening? They own all the radio stations except the two religious ones. I said: How could that be?

It was approved because the Minot service area was considered the same as the service area with Bismarck because their signals overlap. Therefore, it was one market and in a community like Minot, with 40,000 people, one company can essentially own all the radio stations.

The question is: What do they do with those? What kind of localism exists when you have a company whose headquarters is somewhere else controlling a thousand radio stations? Does that matter? It sure does to me. It ought to matter to the Senate. How about television stations?

On this chart, the yellow bar represents the situation in 1996 when we passed the Telecommunications Act. For example, the number of stations Paxson had was 11, and now Paxson has 60 as the red bar indicates. That doesn't describe, incidentally, the management alliances that existed. It is much more aggressive than this chart indicates.

In television and radio stations, we are galloping toward concentrated ownership in a very significant way. I think this Congress ought to ask itself: Is this what we intend? Is this what we want to have happen? Don't we want local ownership in this country with radio and television stations? Do people in our communities not have a voice in what is broadcast on their radio stations? Does their voice have to extend to a city 2,000 miles away where the owner of their radio station resides?

I think the Congress ought to have a good discussion about that. Where does it end? Do we end up with several companies owning almost all the radio stations? In one of our largest cities, two companies will bill over 80 percent of all the billing from radio stations—two companies. Is that competition? I don't think so.

I raise the question because I intend to meet with the FCC and send them a letter and meet with others. I don't mean to be pejorative with Clear Channel. I've never met with them, but they are the largest group in radio owner-

ship. They were approved for the merger with AM/FM. They have well over a thousand stations. Where does this end? Is it good for this country to demolish the notion of localism in broadcasting? I don't think so. I don't think it is good for television or radio. These are public airwaves and they attach to it, in my judgment, the responsibility of certain kinds of public good that must be presented by broadcasters when they accept the responsibility of using the airwaves.

So I raise that question today, and I intend to visit with the National Association of Broadcasters, and especially with the Federal Communications Commission, to ask them if this is really what was intended, is this what Congress wants, and is it something that we think marches in the right direction? Frankly, I don't think so. I hope we can discuss this as we turn the corner next year and talk about public policy and whether we think concentration of radio and television stations is something that should alarm all of us. I believe it should.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I understand we are in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That is correct.

Mr. CRAIG. I ask unanimous consent to speak for the next 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, my colleague from North Dakota has just left the floor. I was off the floor for a few moments, but I know he talked about the Presidential campaign and the proposal by the Governor from Texas to reform Social Security, especially for the young people of our country as it relates to their future participation in it and the amount of money they will ultimately pay into it versus that which they get out.

I thought I would come to the floor for a few moments to share with the Senate several experiences I have had over the last couple of years dealing with Social Security. About a year ago, I did a series of town meetings across my State called senior-to-senior. I invited high school seniors and senior citizens to come together in the same place to talk about Social Security.

Every time you go to a high school, one of the top two or three questions asked is about Social Security. Now, my guess is that the average American would not believe a senior in high school would be that interested in Social Security. But they have probably heard their mom or dad saying you really ought to not plan on Social Security; it is certainly not going to be there when you get to be your grandparents' age. That has been a fairly